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Composing a life

The INQUIRER

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Inquiring Words

The earth is my sacred home. I feel blessed by it. In my life I have seen the most beautiful parts of it. I have sailed on its oceans, through peaceful calms and Atlantic storms. My ship sailed into the rivers and creeks of Nigeria, how rich the colours and how vibrant the sounds.

I had a madness for mountains. You cannot forget the sight of the sun rising over an ice wall as you labour through the alpine dawn. Crimson and gold and snow and silence.

And working round an isolated oil well far into the Sahara desert of Libya. Stillness there too and nothing but sand and the dunes rolling away before you. And you crunch sea shells beneath your boot because once this was the floor of the sea. Three thousand feet below is the oil coming up from yet another age of forests and all kinds of sauropods. The pipe at the surface too hot for the hand to touch.

And I have been a soldier, a parachutist. To leap out of the clattering noise of the aeroplane into starlit night and stillness again and floating down for precious moments before pandemonium.

And I love the woods and fields of home and ancient places.

You cannot tell me there is no God. Not my bible God but another one, a spirit God, of Gaia, the earth. Many a time I have walked with my God. Sometimes with elation, my heart singing and toneless words coming out of my mouth.

And sometimes I walk with shame, seeing what we have done to my earth, my Gaia.

I want to celebrate its goodness and celebrate its seasons, because it such a wonderful place. This earth a speck of wonder in a vast universe giving life and love to each one of us.

It carried me heart and soul into this Unitarian family.

— An Earth Spirit Credo by Tony McNeile

With thanks

This colour issue was sponsored by the Yorkshire Unitarian Union in honour of Kate Taylor. Kate was a great supporter of the YUU and was a member of The Inquirer Board.



Composing a life: we are all 'creatives'

Few of us 'career' through life anymore. It is up to us to create the life we live, according to what we value most writes **Claire MacDonald**

The Australian writer Helen Garner, in an essay from one of her collections called *On Turning Fifty*, reflects on what she has done with her life so far. Widely published, she has written several books, been an activist for social change, nursed a friend through dying, brought up a child, had friends, had one or two marriages – yet she says this: 'The word "career" is one I can never imagine applying to what I do. "Career" is a word that can only be applied from without. It's a word with connotations of speed and certainty, of smooth forcefulness, like the trajectory of a comet seen from a great distance. How can one speak without irony of one's own "career"?'

The word career is an interesting one. In historical terms it is a relatively recent entry into English, a 16th-century acquisition from French that referred, exactly as Helen Garner says, to the course of a speeding body through physical space. It later came to be applied, first to one's 'course' through life, and later still, as life became increasingly professionalised, to the narrative of that professional life – which is where it has, until now, tended to rest. When we are asked to write a curriculum vitae – the course of our life – we write about our jobs, with a little added extra for the other skills that make us, in the eyes of employers, more 'rounded' as people.

Women have fought very hard to have careers, and very hard to have lives as well. For a long time women were excluded from professions, and then had to make the choice between marriage and work and, even now, the juggling act of managing relationships, children, education and work has been particularly hard on women. In this year that commemorates 100 years since Emily Wilding Davison threw herself under the king's horse in the name of women's suffrage, we might remember the struggle to have degrees conferred, to be doctors, to become teachers – all the more galling in a period when education no longer seems like the doorway to better prospects for young people. Instead, it's the doorway to a lifetime of debt, with jobs, let alone careers, retreating somewhere into the distance.

Women's lives have changed, and men's too. We live in uncertain times, and the papers are fond of comparing the present condition with a more stable past – a time 10, 20, 30 years ago depending on who is speaking, when jobs were plentiful and the goal was to be better off than your parents. But this model of past stability and present turbulence isn't the whole story. Good times and hard times come and go, crises take different forms in different places. But if one thing is certain it is that human beings adapt and change. Far from being creatures who can only function in stable times, we have shown ourselves to be very good at improvising, at making new tools, new technologies, new kinds of families, new social movements and new religions, from fragments of the old ones. That's just the way we are.

So when Helen Garner – a public figure and a writer with many awards – balks at the word career, she does so, I think

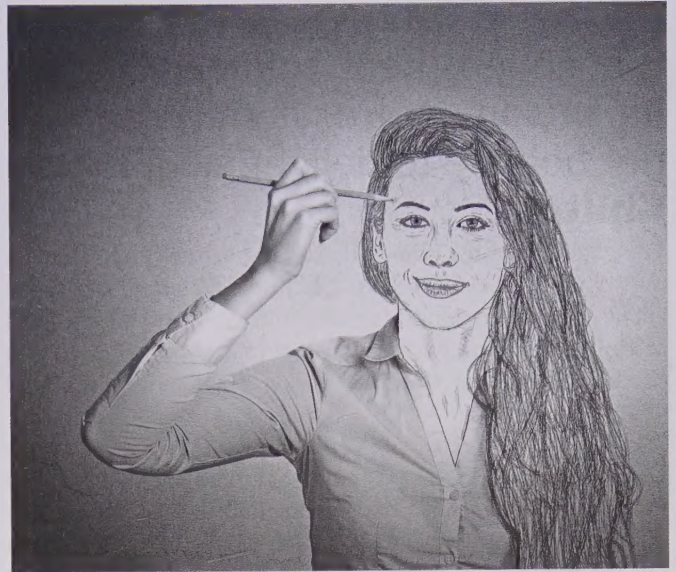


Image by pathdoc via Shutterstock.

because she is asking us to consider different ways of looking at what it is that constitutes a life's work, not just for herself but on behalf of others. The word career implies she says, 'smooth forcefulness' and certainty. It does not apply to the meandering, less-certain course that she sees herself having taken; one which she has quite literally made it up as she goes along. Hers is a life in which she has considered the things she has done as a citizen, as a mother and as a friend, as important as the things she has done that have supported her financially, and what she has written has itself responded to the circumstances, social, political and personal, in which she has found herself. She has practiced what another writer, Mary Catherine Bateson, calls 'composing a life' – shaping the way one lives according to the opportunities that come along, and 'weathering' the bad times.

Bateson's book *Composing a Life*, takes the stories of five women, each of them very different, and looks at the ways in which they have responded to circumstance, improvising where necessary and bringing past skills to new situations. She writes not simply to honour these women, but to look towards the future. In 1990, when she wrote her book, she was looking towards what she called a 'landscape in flux' a future in which 'it will become less and less possible to go on doing the same thing through a lifetime.' 'We will have to learn,' she says, 'to see the value in continual redefinition, to see composing a life from odds and ends as a practice with real, social value.'

Interestingly, it's one thing to acknowledge the variety of a successful writer's life, another thing entirely to realise that what we call 'creatives' are not the only people whose life-shaping we need to acknowledge for the health of all our futures. The other day I ran into a local acquaintance in the Coppergate Centre in York. He was collecting rubbish as part of his job as a security and maintenance man in the shopping centre. We had a little chat. I know that Pete (not his real name) is in his 30s and has two kids, is a great gardener. He lives in public housing and has an end plot, where he, like his dad, grows all his own veg. He has given me lots of garden advice and we mean to swap plants. Gardening, says Mary Catherine

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Cameron's promise of prison reform

In the recent Queen's speech, the government made promises on prison reform it may or may not be able to deliver says **Bruce Chilton**

The statement by the Prime Minister last February about prison reform was unusual. The last UK Prime Minister who spoke about prisons was John Major in 1992, just as the Unitarians set up their Penal Affairs Panel out of concern for prison conditions. At that time the prison population was about 45,000.

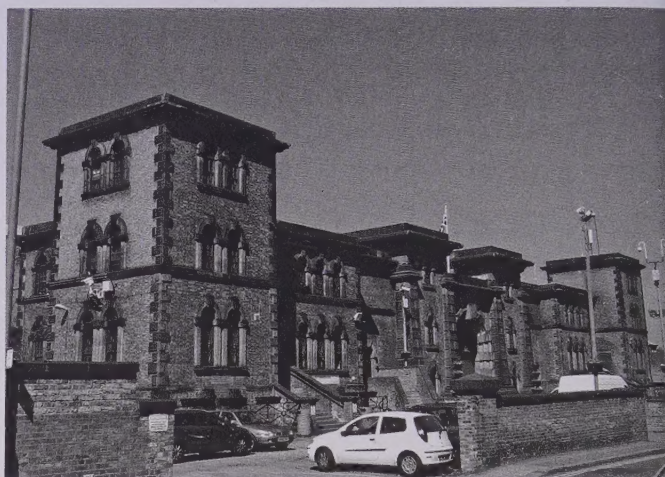
In 2016, the population of prisoners and detained migrants reached 90,000. UK prisons now hold more life-sentence and indeterminate-sentence prisoners than all the other European states combined. Crime statistics have been falling for years but the numbers in prison continue to rise. Sentences grow harsher.

Prison conditions have deteriorated generally since 2010. There may be less 'slopping out' but now a single cell in a Victorian-built prison may have up to four prisoners locked up together overnight and for many daytime hours within a few feet of a water closet surrounded by a low wall. Personal safety, the hours in a locked cell, the opportunities for work, education and exercise are all conditions that have deteriorated under the pressures of overcrowding.

David Cameron promised three major prison reforms in his February statement. He wants to decentralise the prison management system and give prison governors autonomy to introduce in their prisons tailored systems and services which improve physical and mental health, work and education for their prisoners and safety for both prisoners and prison officers. Six 'reform prisons', including HMP Wandsworth, are identified for this special treatment.

Mr Cameron's second major change is to make the prison system more transparent and accountable. He asks which prison produces the best results, the least reoffending, and the most released prisoners into employment. He wishes to introduce better staff, better teachers and some reforms of the education system, including academy schools, into prisons. He identifies Michael Gove, the former Secretary of State for Education and now for Justice, as the initiator of the reforms. New prison tables will be published to show the results so comparisons among prisons can be made and financial rewards paid to staff members who bring about these successful changes.

The third area is described as 'intervention, treatment and behaviour change' and is aimed at specific problems such as the number of children who leave local authority care to become prisoners soon after, and the presence of mothers with babies. They include the spread of Muslim extremists and extremism, the very poor literacy standards of young prisoners and the problems for prisoners of leaving prison and re-entering the wider community. Specialist problem courts, such as drug courts with instant powers of detention and release, and much greater use of electronic tagging of released prisoners and prisoners on day and short-term release are proposed to assist in rehabilitation and reduce reoffending. Older prisons are to be closed and five new prisons to be opened in the life of this



HMP Wandsworth is identified for special treatment. Photo by Herry Lawford, via Wikimedia Commons

Parliament. An extra £130 million is committed to making all these changes work.

The recent Queen's Speech written by the Prime Minister repeats the commitments and again Michael Gove is in charge of them. The decay of the prison system, particularly since 2010, has not been a secret. Mr Cameron stated the problems in Parliament clearly in 2007 and in 2010 before he became Prime Minister. He then suggested many of the proposed answers which now appear as if newly devised. But strong words such as 'Warehousing ever more prisoners is not financially viable' do not amount to strong action. Why has the Prime Minister not acted on the current proposals since 2010? It is difficult not to be cynical.

Are new prisons an effective answer? Only in November 2015, the Ministry of Justice published Prison Population Projections forecasting an increase of 5,000 in the number of prisoners in England and Wales by 2021, which will more than fill five new prisons. More autonomy for prison governors sounds desirable but governors already have much autonomy over funding. Governors, starting with those of the six reform prisons, are to be given 'unprecedented' powers, including legal freedoms to enter partnerships for education, to provide work in prisons and rehabilitation services.

If the much centralised prison administration system is to be slowly de-centralised, will the total cost of prisons each year, now £13 billion, be even higher? Even after the austerity-led cuts in prison officers of 24% since 2010, prison governors continue to spend 85% of their funds on staff and there is a current crisis in the shortage of trained and experienced prison officers. The Prison Officers Association repeatedly states that with too few officers, many prisons have become unsafe for officers as well as inmates. Where is the commitment to the real cost of the proposed reforms? Where is the commitment to dealing with the current problems, particularly overcrowding, which will stifle the proposed improvements just as they have in the past?

Why does the present overcrowding threaten to stifle improvements? As the courts sentence criminals, places for them must be made for them in the prison estate. Most newly convicted and remand, unconvicted prisoners go to a nearby prison. To make space, existing prisoners there are moved to appropriate spaces elsewhere. This 'churn', this constant

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Unitarians craft faith and build wisdom

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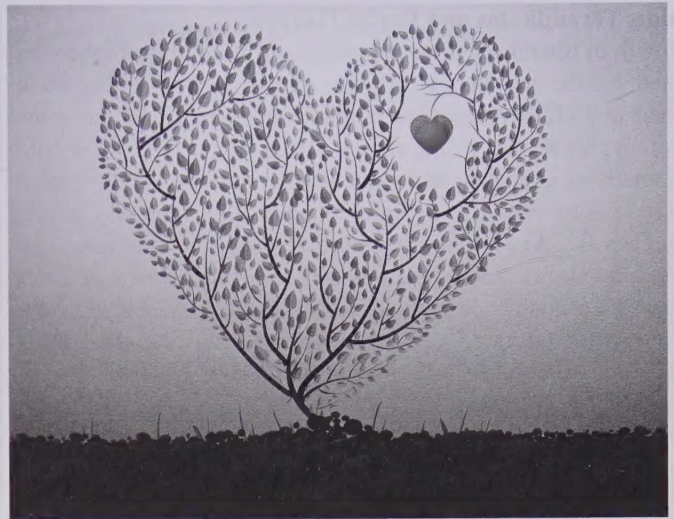
Bateson, is one of those practices whose 'complexity is woven over space and time.' His job defines him no more than the word career defines what Helen Garner does.

I recently heard a senior editor with the Financial Times, talking about the future of work. Not only did he look at some of the bleaker prospects for future work, but he began to turn his own thinking round. He interviewed three women working for a large supermarket. He was surprised at how much they liked their roles. They did them well, and they were, on the whole, very happy. They drew from their own life experience in talking to people, working in teams and listening to stories. The things they did were very little different from the things that companies spend a great deal of time teaching employees to do: work in teams, listen, collaborate. The FT editor began to think that rather than seeing achievement, as Mary Catherine Bateson says, as monolithic and purposeful, we might start to see it as intricately composed from odds and ends, and then look at how to make the most of that in creating livable futures.

The theologian Ivan Illich used to talk about 'tools for conviviality' – also the name of a book he wrote in the 1970s – which are tools that help us to live together well, that anyone can use, that are accessible and flexible and non coercive. The writer Michel De Certeau, also a theologian, talked in his most significant work about 'the practice of everyday life', the way we creatively shape that space into which we are born and in which we will die, the space of the every day.

The gift of these extraordinary writers is to find words for the weaving and shaping that all of us do in composing our lives, and which we are going to be, as the Financial Times editor began to see, increasingly called upon to bring to the table in future. We no longer live – if we ever did – in a world of purposeful forward motion towards more affluence. We live in a world woven from odds and ends, in which we are going to have to acknowledge that the best skills are accessible and shared by all of us, and can be exchanged, and the ones with the most value are the ones that enable us to live well.

Isn't this where we have always been as Unitarians? Crafting faith, life, from odds and ends, valuing the every day, building our own theologies from the wisdom of ancient and new practices, near and far? Part of the strength of Unitarianism in future may lie in the way it resonates with this old/new



'The gift of these extraordinary writers is to find words for the weaving and shaping that all of us do in composing our lives.' idea that there is value in continually remaking and reshaping the present using fragments of the old. The tools we have to make new forms of faith are the tools we are using everyday in our lives. Gardens, homes, children, friendship, care for others, compassion, tolerance, the ability to see the other view, are all things that Ivan Illich might also have called tools for conviviality. They are tools that make things better between people in this uncertain world.

Another Australian writer Paul Carter calls this process creative re-membering, putting back together the things you bring from elsewhere in new ways. We can perhaps reclaim the word career now, and see each of our lives as an arc that we continually refashion and reinvent as we move through time and space. How ordinary the elements are that make lives, and yet they are touched with grace.

Mary Catherine Bateson ends her book with these words. 'The compositions we create in these times of change are filled with interlocking messages of our commitment and decisions. Each one is a message of possibility.'

Claire MacDonald lives in London and is training for Unitarian Ministry.



Prison reform will depend on lower numbers

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moving of prisoners, undermines any good reformatory work being done. Training courses go unfinished. Medical, education and rehabilitation records get left behind. Often, prisoners can become 'lost' for long periods. How can there be autonomy for governors, transparency and comparisons of results of different prisons or good rehabilitation for prisoners?

The obvious answer is to reduce the number of prisoners to allow the prison system to find some stability. But reducing the numbers sent to prisons does not appear in the Prime Minister's statements. It will not be easy. Since 1991, Conservative and Labour Governments have pursued political support by legislating for many more offences and much harsher sentencing. Both parties have won supporters with such

sound bites as 'Prison Works'. The attitudes and statements of politicians have hardened public attitudes.

Perhaps the statements of the Prime Minister in February and May signal the recognition by politicians at last of the failure of prison policies. Do they start to re-lead the public towards more effective and less harsh attitudes on crime and prisons? Some commentators on the Queen's Speech have suggested immediately that the Prime Minister promotes prison, education, child-care, pension and such 'soft' social legislation in the speech to widen support for the EU Referendum in June. We Unitarians must hope this is not so and successful prison reforms will quickly follow. We must wait and see.

Bruce Chilton, writing for the Unitarian Penal Affairs Panel

Scholar looks at Unitarian congregations

By Valdis Tēraudkalns and Deniss Hanovs

The growth of liberal religious congregations is contrary to theories presented by the number of scholars. Dean Kelley in his book published in 1972 expressed an opinion that for a church to grow numerically, there has to be clarity about its purpose, it should offer something important and valuable that demands commitment by return. Kelley who was commissioned by the National Council of Churches (USA) to find out why the evangelical churches are growing argued that these groups make serious demands and that's why they are growing.¹ In similar fashion Rodney Stark and Roger Finke borrowing terms from economics argue that, 'liberal religious doctrines fail to mobilise support, not because of what they offer, but because of what they lack.'² For both sociologists Unitarian Universalists (UU)³ attract a tiny following because 'unbelievers have no earthly (and surely no heavenly) reason to join a church.'⁴

Scholars studying contemporary religious movements do not often write on Unitarians because of reasons described above – an assumption that it is on the conservative side of religion where 'real action' takes place.

Unitarians do not have single and simple answer to the question whether going beyond Christian traditions has contributed to numerical growth of their movement and whether it is what Unitarians should do at all. Some, like Jaume de Marcos Andreu (Spain) among pillars of the model of UU in 21st century mention spiritual pluralism beyond religions (for this author two other pillars are a person-centered approach – not ego-worship but learning to overcome shortcomings to achieve a broader and more inclusive vision of life) and a soteriology of liberation.⁵ Others like Jim Corrigan, minister at Padiham Unitarian Chapel and Lancashire Collaborative Ministry, believe Unitarians 'may have been facing the wrong way in targeting so much of our publicity effort at the 'spiritual but not religious.'⁶ Graham Phoenix, who joined Unitarians after being member of the Church of England, similarly is quite critical of what he has experienced among Unitarians: 'What I find is a disparate collection of independent little churches, each protectively doing their own thing and diligently following whatever local party line is being actively encouraged by whoever happens to be holding the reins.'⁷

Christian Unitarians, who would like to keep the liberal Christian identity of Unitarianism, naturally offer a space for people who are looking for inclusive religion expressed in Christian terms. The Avington Manifesto, prepared in 2007 by a Unitarian Christian working group (consisting of people coming from several European Unitarian groups) refers to Jesus' teaching as one of sources of Unitarianism. At the same time it does not copy doctrinal documents of mainline Christian churches and it states that teaching of Jesus is 'transmitted not only through the New Testament but also by the contribution of some of the apocryphal gospels, for example, the Gospel of Thomas.'⁸ Transylvanian Unitarianism is even more on the Christian side of theological spectrum – it adheres to catechism that includes also the confession of faith: *I believe in one God, the creator of life, our providential Father. I believe in Jesus, the best among the sons of God, our true master-teacher. I believe in the Holy Spirit. I believe in the mission of the Unitarian Church. I believe in repentance and eternal life.*⁹

There are others in the Unitarian movement who feel comfortable with a variety of spiritualities being practiced and kept together in a creative way. Mike Rutter from Chorlton Unitarian Chapel writes: 'I have now found a congenial spiritual home. ... I have always been interested in "alternative" ideas, e.g. meditation, esoteric systems of thought etc., as well as in conventional science.'¹⁰ Alan John



Valdis Tēraudkalns

Balcombe writes: 'I think it is a positive thing to have worship v Christians, humanists, Universalists, atheists etc. This is a reflection of society.'¹¹ Present challenges and tensions in Unitarian identity building are not viewed by all as something negative. Minister AA Pakula has expressed a conviction that 'the Unitarian congregations that remain will find their strength and begin the process of creating new Unitarianism – very different from the Unitarianism of today.'

Unitarians face competitors in their share of the 'market of religions' – these are at first liberal Christian congregations in other denominations. There are radical thinkers among them who are well equipped to respond to skepticism towards traditional religions. Brian Mountford, Vicar of the University Church in Oxford, has written a book on Christian atheism where he states: 'Could it be that some of the atheists are writing the most seminal books of theology for our time, because they raise questions that resonate, they are people talking and discussing and thinking about things often unremarked or too sacrosanct to speak of.'¹³

There are also post-Christian groups like the Sunday Assembly which also exists in Australia, Germany, Ireland, New Zealand, and the United States. It was founded in London by Radio 4 comedians Sanderson Jones and Pippa Evans. They describe their movement as 'godless congregation that celebrates life.' Derek McAuley describes their meetings, which attract mainly young people, as something like evangelical testimony how severe illness (dogmatic faith) has been overcome. Sanderson is a skilful performer. The event is close in style to Unitarian General Assembly meetings.¹⁴ The Sunday Assembly has been influenced by ideas of philosopher, writer, and television presenter Alain de Botton. His version of atheism incorporates human need for connection and ritual. He says:

*'The challenge facing atheists is how to reverse the process of religious colonization: how to separate ideas and rituals from the religious institutions which have laid claim to them but don't truly own them.'*¹⁵

Many British Unitarians would find it hard to accept 'Songs of Praise' typical to the Evangelical tradition as part of their worship. However some are experimenting with these forms of music to attract young people. All-Souls Non-Subscribing congregation in Belfast (part of the Non-Subscribing Presbyterian Church of Ireland, a sister denomination to British Unitarians) has a 'Jesus Praise' band made up of young people alienated by prejudice in Evangelical circles. It could be a way for other Unitarians to attract people coming from Evangelical tradition, including younger people who are not used to traditional organ music.

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Traditional outreach may not bring growth

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General, outreach methods used by Unitarians are similar to those developed by mainline churches. According to Michael B. Sanderson, presiding bishop of the Episcopal Church (USA) for whom Universalism is 'about helping others find their way to a relationship with God without our trying to control the outcome.'¹⁷ Most Unitarians would agree with the content of this statement even if the word 'evangelism' is not often used by Unitarians. The same can be said about efforts of mainline churches to 'package' their message in a new way. Sally Gaze describes some good practices of church life among rural Anglican parishes: Café Church in Thorndon (a village in East Anglia) – people at the beginning of their meeting avoid 'service' is avoided) have coffee and hot croissants, then move to church pews and have interactive drama involving all, followed by a simple explanation of the meaning of drama; 'Gathering' at a remote barn in the Buckinghamshire village of Biggleswade – music ranging from Russian Orthodox to Afrobeat, simple chant, silence and symbols.¹⁸ She herself has been in parish ministry for a number of years. Some of projects, such as in all churches, would be easier to manage for Unitarians than for Anglicans because growing cell groups have no status in the Church of England and it would be difficult to fit them in existing system where their membership is not based on geographical parishes, they have no building, there is no mother church with natural oversight and because members of cells attend different parish churches.¹⁹ On the other hand, that is changing because the Church of England is trying to respond to challenges it faces.

Robert Nelson West, who was President of the UUA (1969-1977), in his memoirs writes how the Sharing in Growth program was adopted by the UUA board in 1972. The new approach was primarily aimed at a plural society, not a people of organised religions. Four key terms: breadth (community – genuine community) – we should reach out to meet different needs that arise from loneliness in people), depth (ultimate questions) – helping persons with personal religion, breadth (programs) – local church programs should have variety and balance



Sanderson Jones spoke at a Sunday assembly meeting held at Cross Street Chapel in 2013. Sunday Assembly photo

to meet diversity, growth (sharing) – openly sharing our Unitarian Universalist religion.²⁰

An inquiry group met in the UK from October 2007 to March 2008 – mostly Unitarians but also Quakers and a member of the 'Sea of Faith' network. They made a number of recommendations, among them – 'creative opportunities for worship outside of the Sunday am or pm should be explored'. The range of alternatives to formal worship should be explored e.g. meditation groups, retreats, congregational weekends, pilgrimages, shared meals.²¹ They also noted, 'the role of acceptance (of those of any faith or none) might be the key to developing Unitarianism. However it is currently a passive idea, and one which is tested every time someone new encounters a Unitarian group.'²² By passive, the group meant a kind of 'shoulder-shrugging relativism'.

See Valdis and Deniss's conclusions and notes on case studies of three British Unitarian congregations in the next issue of 'The Inquirer'.

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'Heresy', inquiry and a man lost at sea

By Holly Welsh

It is a wonderful thing, to take the time to delve into the history of your congregational past. And this is the very task to which I have been appointed. As an assistant preacher at Effra Road Chapel, I am on a mission to pull together images and short biographies on all our previous ministers in order to build a gallery for our church, starting with the mysterious Thomas Wood of 1839, who served as minister when the church was founded.

It has already proven to be a gripping journey through the history of our Chapel, South London and well beyond. Starting at the beginning, there is the matter of the aforementioned Thomas Wood, for whom no obituary can be found, but who was a lecturer at the Anglican-dissenters' *Beaumont Institute* and aroused great ire in the *Christian Examiner* and *General Review* following a lecture in 1841 in which he appeared to challenge the Trinitarian doctrine. A few years later leads us to Thomas Lethbridge Marshall, who came to us from far-off Boston, Massachusetts, and was an editor of this very publication from 1855-1888.

But perhaps most intriguing of all is the matter of much-loved minister Rev William Macquhock Ainsworth, who died in mysterious circumstances aboard a ship somewhere off the coast of Constantinople in 1891, to the shock and distress of the congregation and wider Unitarian community.

Across almost two centuries, there is still much to uncover. If your Chapel has a connection with any of our former ministers, and you would like to contribute to our journey of discovery, we would be incredibly grateful. On page 9 is a list of ministers, but we are also interested in learning more about laypeople of note such as Sir Henry Tate of Tate & Lyle, British Industrialist Frederick Nettlefold, Mr and Mrs J Mappin, Alfred Pound and the Martineau family, all of whom contributed to the life of Brixton Unitarians. Biographical information, rumour, living relatives and most importantly images would all be most welcome, and all contributors will be acknowledged in the end result.

Please do get in touch with our minister Julian on minister@brixtonunitarians.org, or via post at: Brixton Unitarian Chapel, 63 Effra Road, Brixton, LONDON, SW2 1BZ

Bury Unitarians celebrate cherry blossoms

Bury Unitarians held their latest special service, on Sunday, 1 May. This was a Cherry Blossom Service – the idea of our minister, the Rev Beryl Allerton. Every year at this time the cherry trees outside the church are full of the most beautiful pink blossoms, although, sadly, this year, the flowers were not as far advanced as usual. When Chairman of the Congregation, Anne Mills, was a child, she attended Bank Street Chapel, on the same site, and the Anniversary Sermons, on the last Sunday in April, usually coincided with the height of the blossom-season; she remembers wading through the ankle-deep flowers that had blown off the trees that lined the edge of the chapel graveyard.

During the service, the congregation sang five rousing hymns, all of which celebrated spring, new life, and the earth's beauty. Organist Chris Price played a brilliant, jazz version of 'Life is Just a Bowl of Cherries', which had everyone smiling and tapping their feet. Two beautiful readings from Lau-



Abi Elliott (right) and Anne Mills.
Photo by Howard Maden

rie Lee's 'The English Spring', given by Val Chamberlain and Marian Price respectively, were wonderfully reminiscent of childhood and all the traditions of May Day. The sermon concentrated on Hanami, the Japanese tradition of celebrating the cherry blossom season; this is very short – about two weeks in length – and can occur at any time between the end of March and early May. The Japanese weather bureau issues forecasts so that everyone knows where the most beautiful blossoms are to be found, and outdoor parties, often attended by thousands of people, in the public parks and gardens, abound – often lasting until well into the night.

During the service, new member, Abi Elliott McGuffie was welcomed formally to the church and presented with a chalice badge to celebrate her new status. A congregational photograph was taken of everyone present.

– Anne Mills

Renewal Group invites sharing of faith

The Unitarian Renewal Group (URG) is pleased to be sponsoring a 'day gathering' at Dunham Road Chapel, Altrincham on Saturday, 17 September. The theme is *Articulating Your Faith (Who Do You Think You Are?)*. In a denomination that is defined by principles rather than beliefs, we do nevertheless, each of us have a personal faith that both sustains and challenges us to action – and this will be the focus of the day.

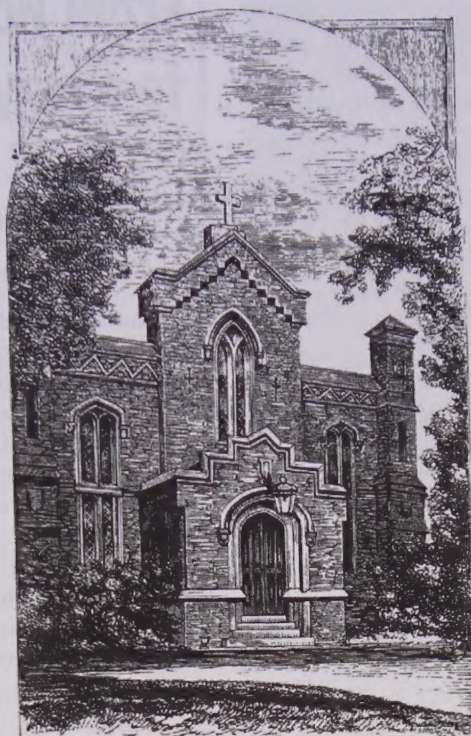
The day runs from 10.30am to 4pm and all are welcome. The three speakers will be Bob Janis-Dillon, minister on Merseyside with ministerial experience in the USA; Margaret Kirk, retired following a ministry in York and currently with pastoral oversight at Whitby; and Jim Timiney, member of Bradford Unitarians and active lay preacher.

The speakers will share their personal faith stances, after which there will be plenty of time for all participants to discuss, share and reflect. Dunham Road Chapel is five minutes' walk from Altrincham train/Metro/bus station and there is a car park across the road. Please bring your own lunch. Tea and coffee will be available.

URG is offering this as a free event, welcoming donations. For fuller information please contact either Celia Midgley (01756 228387) email celiamidgley@hotmail.com or David Dawson (01943 608354) email dcdawson3@hotmail.com. No need to book in advance but a brief telephone call or email message to one of the above would be helpful for administrative purposes.

– Celia Midgley

Help us bring South London's Unitarian history to life



Unitarian Chapel, Effra Road, BRIXTON (London).

Brixton Unitarians at Effra Road Chapel are undertaking a project to bring the history of our ministers and the other bold, clever and significant women and men who laid the foundations of our church.

Many of our ministers (listed below) and important congregation members are known to other Unitarian churches, such as the Mappins and Webbs (who were married at our church), Mrs Sydney Martineau and Professor Philemon Moore and Frederick Nettlefold, British Industrialist and Unitarian lay leader who was a key benefactor in our original chapel. We are looking for photographs and biographical information on these individuals who laid the foundations of our present church. If you have any information, please do get in touch with Julian at minister@brixtonunitarians.org or 020 7737 7576, the entire congregation would be most grateful.

EFFRA ROAD CHAPEL
63 Effra Road
Brixton
London SW2 1BZ

BRIXTON UNITARIAN CHURCH MINISTERS

1839 - 40	T. Wood
1841	W. Linwood
1842 - 47	A.M. Walker
1848 - 60	Dr. Harrison
1861 - 73	T.L. Marshall
1874 - 83	J. Worthington
1884 - 91	W.M. Ainsworth
1891	T.W. Freckleton
1892 - 99	J. Harwood
1900 - 06	F.W. Stanley
1907 - 12	Dr. G.C. Cressey
1913 - 15	G.M. Elliott
1916 - 17	SUPPLIES
1918 - 26	T. Munn
1927 - 34	H. Crabtree
1935 - 39	H.L. Short
1940 - 42	R.K. Spedding
1943 - 62	E.G. Lee
1962 - 63	SUPPLIES
1963 - 74	R. Tayler
1974 - 86	R. Tayler (Minister Emeritus)
1986 - 87	SUPPLIES
1987 - 91	J. Jewsbury
1991 - 92	Tony Cross (Pastoral Oversight)
1992 -	Julian Smith (Church Leader)

Giving away the gift of 'inspiration'

The other Saturday was a rare gift for me as I got to spend the day with my brother and niece. My niece Scarlet was competing in the national under-11 girls chess championship, held at Cheadle Hulme School just a few miles from where I live. I joined them to cheer 'Our Scarlet' on. (I realised a little later that cheering someone on while playing chess might not be entirely appropriate...Tee, hee, hee...)

I rarely get the chance to spend time with my brother, one of the few people who have known me and I have known all my life. So it was a real treat. It was a proud moment for him too. His daughter was captaining her Hertfordshire county team, on the top table – at just 8 years old. My only concern was whether she would compete against someone from Yorkshire, in which case my loyalties would be split. Thankfully this did not happen, as Yorkshire do not compete. Apparently they like to do things their own way ... some things never change in the 'Great County'. My brother had a love and talent for chess as a child too, so he was excited for his daughter, and her love for chess and her talent have reawakened a passion in him. He recounted how he taught me as a child, but I had no real interest. He was taught by our older stepbrother, 'Our Allen', who, sadly, died a couple of years ago. The gift and inspiration Al passed on is living on. It was a lovely day spending time with family, sharing in something they love. It was also a real blessing, a beautiful gift to witness these young people applying and enjoying themselves through a game.

Chess is not a game for me. I know how to play, how the pieces work, etc. but I don't understand the game. My mind is just not wired up and tuned in that way. My mind, my heart and my soul work in very different ways. That said, it was a beautiful gift to witness the children making use of what they have been given. I left inspired by these young people. We all have our gifts, our different abilities. No two people are exactly alike. We are all born with certain aptitudes and innate ability. We all have something to offer the world. Thank God. I have always been a communicator, but never an athlete. My mum tells me I could talk long before I could walk – that a person could hold a conversation with me as toddler, before I took my first steps. There were two reasons for this. My mind is wired for communication and also I was born with under-developed nerve endings in the base of my spine. This made physical activities difficult. There was even a time when I was not allowed to engage in sport during childhood. I hated it as I watched the other children play.

I have been re-feeling these memories in recent weeks as I have been attempting to get fit, working with a personal trainer. The old problems are still there, only I'm much older now. That said, the shame is gone and I am determined to make the most of my body, despite its limitations. While never athletic and not wired up for chess, I have always been a determined person. I try to make the most of what I have been given, no matter how limited – for the good of all. Whatever we have been given, what life has been gifted to us, is not for ourselves alone. This has been a strange year so far. One phenomenon is the high rate of 'celebrity' deaths. Many icons have died this year, an unprecedented number in fact. From David Bowie, Alan Rickman and Terry Wogan in January to Victoria Wood and Prince at the end of April and many, many, more. The Daily Telegraph, which maintains a gallery of famous people's deaths, recorded more deaths by the end of April 2016 (75) than 2014 (38) and 2015 (30) combined.

Now this could just be put down as a one-off, an unfortunate

From nothing
to Everything
by
Danny Crosby



year. But it seems that this trend is likely to continue – because people who became famous during the 1960's and 1970's, when the age of celebrity really took off, are now dying. Many of the celebrities, who died this year, are from the baby-boom generation, the first to experience TV fame. This is when people first began to be swept up by the cult of celebrity and it has continued to grow ever since, even more so in this mass social media age.

The trend will continue; we will lose more and more. It's something we will all have to get used to. This is not something we should get too sad about. People like Bowie, Prince, Terry Wogan, Victoria Wood, Alan Rickman shone. And they inspired us in their own unique ways, making the most of their gifts and sharing them with us. People closer to us, ordinary people, have also done so by sharing their lives and their loves. Just as we all do. There are many people we have known who have no doubt inspired us to be all that we can be, as we have inspired others to be all that they can be. Just think of the lives that you have touched and the lives that have touched yours...so many moments...Far too many to mention.

By making best use of the gifts we have been given, we can inspire others to do the very same. 'Inspire' is one of those words that has been reduced in meaning as time as gone by. We have reduced its power in our secularised lives. It originally meant 'immediate influence of God', especially with reference to the writing of a Holy book. Coming from the French 'inspiracion' meaning 'inhaling, breathing in inspiration', coming from the Latin 'inspirare' meaning to breathe in, to inflame. To inspire means to breathe upon, to blow into, to excite, to affect, to arouse through spirit or soul. It is a Divine activity.

Therefore it seems reasonable to conclude that when we inspire others we are engaging in Divine activity. To inspire others is to engage in one of the highest form of love, as it is Divine love in human action. We all have gifts, talents, that have been bestowed upon us and I believe we have a responsibility to use these gifts well, and to recognise that the spirit which gave us these gifts requires us to use them cooperatively with those bearing different gifts. They are not to be used lightly and selfishly, neither are they to be despised or loathed.

In so doing we will inspire others to do the same, to make the most of what they have been freely given. Let us be grateful for the gifts that have been bestowed upon us. Let us make the most of these aspects of our humanity given to us. Let us learn to share them with one another. Let us be inspired by one another's gifts and create a true kin-ship of love right here, right now. Let's breathe our inspiration into one another.

The Rev Danny Crosby is minister at Altrincham and Urmston.

Bradford Peace Trail and Peace Museum

By Jimmy Timiney

The Yorkshire Unitarian Union Spring Gathering day in April this year was held at the Bradford Unitarian Church. Fortunately, it was a fine day and people began to gather by mid-morning from the YUU district and the host congregation.

Tables were set in place for those who wanted to try their hands at crafts such as knitting, card making and threading prayer beads. The church was set up café style and the morning moved on to 'The Entertainment', that is we entertained ourselves. There were hymns from 'Sing Your Faith' and participants from the body of the audience took it in their turn to do a spot – Shakespeare, fiddle playing, poetry, guitar and singing and so forth – and everyone was in good heart.

After a splendid lunch the main body of the people took a walking tour into the City (Bradford Unitarian Church is only a short walk away) taking in some interesting sights, including some of the Bradford Peace Trail, and a visit to the Peace Museum.

The walk included stopping by the mirror pool, the largest urban water feature in the UK. On this site stood the first nonconformist place of worship in Bradford, built in 1718, later the congregation became Unitarian in theology. Bradford Unitarians' roots lay with these echoes of the past.

The Peace Museum had kindly opened up especially for our group and people were able to look at the many exhibits. On display too is a Unitarian Chalice and information about its beginning and what it represents today.

From the museum's literature we can read: - *'The Peace Museum is the only museum in the UK which is dedicated to the history and often untold stories of peace, peacemakers and the peace movement in the UK.'*

History is only part of the museum's story. They also have outreach into the wider community, recently having an externally funded exhibition called 'Choices' based on the First World War and conscientious objectors, and compared it with choices that are faced today. Over 1000 students, teachers and other groups have been encouraged through workshops to discuss themes such as conflict resolution. The workshops relate to the government Prevent Duty and take an innovative and creative approach to countering radicalisation by empowering young people to develop confidence in taking



Yorkshire Unitarians gathered for a splendid lunch.

hard decisions affecting their personal lives.

After leaving the museum the group proceeded to the Wool Exchange. John Ruskin was invited to speak to the great and good who were planning the building, he talked about 'Traffic', he spoke about the sinful trafficking in the temple and the goddess of getting on, he was referring to Jesus when he drove out the money lenders from the temple. It was then built as a gothic revival commercial building that looks like a church where business was done with a handshake. It is now a bookshop.

After continuing the walking tour, we returned to the church and refreshments, this was followed by a short epilogue and people departed back to their home towns.

For further reading visit: -

www.peacemuseum.org.uk - www.cityforpeace.org.uk - www.choicesthenandnow.org.uk

Jimmy Timiney is a member of Bradford Unitarians

He says: I have used the word 'splendid' because it was one of Kate Taylor's favourite words. If Kate had still been with us she would have been the person who I am sure would have written this report. The YUU has dedicated this colour supplement to the memory of Kate. Who is still sadly missed.

Bradford's Proud History of Peace Studies: Peace and Love. The Violin and the Oboe

By Margaret Kirk

Adam Curle, a Quaker, was appointed the first professor of Peace Studies at the University of Bradford. He was one of a number of distinguished speakers who gave the Essex Hall Lecture at our Unitarian GA meetings in London in 1977 called *Peace and Love, The Violin and the Oboe*. He is celebrated at the Peace Museum. Under his direction, Bradford University forged the way in making Peace Studies a discipline where peace and conflict came to be recognised as worthy of academic study. In time other universities developed courses based on the model provided by this one.

Although a skilled peace negotiator as a mediator during the Nigerian Civil War (1967 – 70) and the Indo-Pakistan War (1971) and in many other parts of the world including the Balkans, Sri Lanka, Northern Ireland, his lecture dealt with the subject of peace in the broadest possible way. It was not about mediation skills and conflict resolution but about his developing awareness as a Quaker, that stillness and quietness within the self was a pre-requisite for peace in the

world. He described the human mind as a great computer from which we are retrieving and assembling information in every aspect of our lives – intellectual, emotional and physical. Its noise prevents us from hearing anything of subtlety. As he put it 'the chatter of our computer makes it hard for us to hear other people.'

One of the finest examples he gave in the lecture was of his meeting with Native Americans who teach their children to listen: 'When my Native American friends came to visit me, they would sit very quietly for a few minutes. They were stilling the noise of their own thoughts and feelings, so that they could better listen, not only to my words, but to my feelings, to sense my mood, and to understand what they could best do to help, encourage, or strengthen me; and this they were always able to do.'

Adam Curle was awarded the Ghandi peace prize in 2000 in recognition of his long commitment to peace work.

At the end of the Essex Hall Lecture Adam Curle said that peace and love were like the solo instruments in Bach's concerto for violin and oboe, 'separate but absolutely interdependent in the creation of ordered beauty.'

Margaret Kirk is a retired Unitarian minister.

Walk on: A reflection on Hillsborough



A vigil for the 96 Hillsborough dead was held in Liverpool on 27 April, just after a new inquest jury found that they were unlawfully killed. Photo by John Bradley via Wikimedia Commons

Editor's note: Owing to an email transmission error an early, incomplete, draft of this article appeared in a previous issue. This is the complete piece.

By Nicky Jenkins

The lesson of the Hillsborough disaster to me is one of human failing. I had forgotten how we viewed football crowds in those days. I was scared of them and nice people made sure to avoid areas around football pitches on match days. They were always referred to as football hooligans and they drank too much and got into fights with the opposing team. Indeed many of them got into fights with fellow supporters and bashed their families up if their team lost.

I think it was not just football hooligans who were people to be avoided, but the working classes. In general the power of the mob was what scared the middle classes of which I was one. Large numbers of strong working-class young men with considerable disaffection for the system – unemployment was high under Maggie T – were anxiety-making and unpredictable. The miners had fought back against the police when they were on strike. The police were keeping order and were the 'goodies', keeping behaviour as it should be, making sure people followed the rules of civilised society so that we could all be safe.

So the Police guy in charge on the day was a supreme example of a control freak. That's what he thought he was there to do, to keep control of all the troublesome drunken football hooligans. Perhaps it suited his nature. Anyhow he had a clear idea of what 'these people' were about. They needed to be kept under control. He had no concept in his brain of the job being one of keeping people safe. And I think possibly he believed his own

story about the mob breaking down the gate.

And when I look back at how I saw things in those days, I realise how unaware I was of being told a story that suited the government of the time, that propped up the crumbling social mores of the time, that perpetuated a 'them and us' scenario. It really only struck me when I saw those old newspaper headlines.

So be careful. Remember when an acceptance of a story of otherness resulted in the deaths of those 96 people, children, men and one woman. It didn't do to question in the Police Force. It didn't do to question in Local Government, it didn't do to cast aspersions on show-biz personalities. The Institutions resisted, stuck together and tried to keep their positions of power and authority over lesser mortals. And look at the damage they caused!

So perhaps we can rejoice that at last things have changed, that questions are being asked, that we demand a human face, that we claim our rights to equality before the law and that apologies have been made, that some people are confessing before they die and sometimes under extreme pressure. Yes, there are political points to make if you want to go down that path but for me it's a wake-up call. Wake up and watch where I put people into categories. How my reactions and my behaviours and attitudes are influenced by a horde of stereotypes – which can easily be supported by viewing life through that distorted lens. Come down off my high horse and interact with people from a human place, from a vulnerable place. Now that's the tricky bit, being vulnerable. And learning to feel safe so you can risk it.

Nicky Jenkins is minister at Chorlton.